

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
#391**

**MICHAEL ELKOVICS  
USS *ST. LOUIS*, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON  
DECEMBER 5, 2001  
BY CAPTAIN DONALD B. FRASER &  
CHIEF DAVID JARVIS**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**Donald Fraser (DF):** [ *The following interview was conducted by Captain Donald B. Fraser and* ] Chief David Jarvis, United States Naval Reserve in support of the National Park Service and the *Arizona* Memorial at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii, 5 December, 2001, at approximately four o'clock in the afternoon. The interviewee is Michael Elkovics, who was a seaman first class aboard USS *St. Louis* on the seventh of December, 1941. Mr. Elkovics, for the record, would you please state your full name?

**Michael Elkovics (ME):** Michael Elkovics.

DF: And where was your place of birth?

ME: [ *Wallington* ], New Jersey.

DF: And when was that?

ME: November 14, 1921.

DF: What did you consider to be your hometown in 1941?

ME: New Jersey, Wallington. That's where I was born. In fact, they have a bronze plaque for all World War I veterans and Pearl Harbor and now they extended all the wars, different wars, Korean and Vietnam and Desert Storm and so forth.

DF: What were your parents' names, Mr. Elkovics?

ME: My father's name was John. My mother's name was Susan.

DF: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

ME: I had two brothers and three sisters.

DF: And where were you in the family?

ME: I was the last one. I was the youngest [*(black-sheep)*].

DF: Where did you go to high school?

ME: I went to, I graduated eighth grade and I went to, I didn't go to high school. I went to, it was—I don't know what you call it. They taught you how to do things, like woodwork and all that.

DF: Oh, a technical school?

ME: Right. For two years I went there. And then my—see, 'cause my father, he died when I was three years and my mother died when I was fourteen years old. And then I lived with my sisters for a while but I, they were always on my back so when I was old enough, sixteen, I joined the CC[C] [*Civilian Construction Corps*] Camp.

DF: Where was the CC[C] Camp?

ME: I was in Jersey, Hackettstown, New Jersey. I was there for two years. And then from there I enlisted in the navy.

DF: What attracted you to the navy?

ME: Well, when I was a small boy I used to watch my brother-in-laws or my big brother used to take me, you know, in the Hudson River they had the battleships and they had a lot of the ships used to come there and they used to light up all the Hudson. You could see all them big lights, the floodlights [*searchlights*] and all that. Every kid was, looked up to it, you know. So, well, I says—I had a lot of friends with me was in the CC[C] Camp, they joined the army, Marine Corps, and I said, "No, I'll take the navy."

DF: Do you remember when you enlisted?

ME: Yeah, August, about August 20, something like that, 1940.

DF: So you were eighteen, nineteen?

ME: I was about eighteen years old.

DF: And where did you go after, what happened after you enlisted?

ME: I went to Newport News [*Naval*] Training Center. From there, after we were there so many weeks, eight or some weeks, around like that, they give us so many days leave. It was eight or nine days, or something like that. And then we, then I reported back and they sent me aboard the USS *St. Louis* [*CL-49*] with fifty men from the same boot camp. And also fifty men went on the [*USS*] *Arizona* [*BB-39*] at the same time.

DF: And you picked up *St. Louis* in what port?

ME: Norfolk, Virginia. She was in dry dock. And we got there just before lunchtime. We all ate and you know how dry dock is so they had to work on the bottom. So after we had three sandwiches or something like that and soda, they sent us aboard. They told us put our dungarees on and they had scaffolds rigged all over the ship and we had to go and scrape the bottom of the ship. And I don't know, I looked down there. I says, "Oy," I got a little leery, you know.

And but got over it, so. And then afterwards we, when we got out of the dry dock, I think we went to the West Coast and we went to Hawaii and all that.

DF: Getting under way for the first time, do you remember that? When you finally came out of dry dock and...

ME: Yeah. We went out for a trial cruise first and then we were sent to the West Coast, to Long Beach. We went through the Panama Canal and all that and so forth. And then before the war, about a month and a half before the war started, we were sent to the Philippines to pick up two [ *U.S.* ] Army transports loaded with civilians and army, navy high-ranking personnel. We brought 'em down to Pearl Harbor. We got there four days before December 7. And then they transferred them to the States. And then the night before December 7, there was one carrier. I don't know what exactly, whether it was the *Enterprise* or what. She left the night before Pearl Harbor, she left. Otherwise there would've been nothing left of her.

*[Note: The aircraft carrier was the USS Lexington (CV-2), and it was enroute to Midway Island having departed Pearl Harbor on 5 DEC 1941.]*

DF: Let me just take you back for a moment. Did you steam in company with other ships? Was the *St. Louis* with other ships when you left Norfolk and came through the Panama Canal and to Pearl Harbor?

ME: No, we were probably by ourselves.

DF: By yourselves.

ME: Yeah. 'Cause we even went to the Philippines by ourself.

DF: Okay. Do you recall approximately how long you were here in Honolulu before you went to the Philippines?

ME: Hmm, I don't think we were there too long, you know.

DF: Okay. I was wondering if...

ME: Yeah.

DF: ...if you had a chance to go on liberty here in Honolulu?

ME: We went to Honolulu, yeah, because everybody used to go, there was one bar that would—I forgot what they called it, Porthole or something, on [*Hotel*] Street. All the sailors and all the marines, everybody used to hang around there because beer was a nickel, you know. You didn't get much money then. You made twenty-one dollars a month. And out of that, they took out three dollars for insurance a month and—but everything was so cheap, you know. You used to get a whole full meal for thirty cents or a quarter. Like today, Christ, you \_\_\_\_\_ it, you're making good money but you have to pay more.

DF: That's right. Now *St. Louis* was new to Pearl Harbor and I understand that many of the ships sort of had their own bars. How was it for a *St. Louis* sailor who's new, with a new ship from the East Coast? Was there any problems with...

ME: No, no problem. 'Cause we used to have a—Long Beach, California used to be our homeport. Long Beach because, I don't know why, but they named that the homeport for her. And just before the war, when we came back from the Philippines, we never unloaded our ammunition, like these other ships in Pearl Harbor, you had to, before certain days, you had to unload so much of your ammunition. But we never did. That's when we, on December 7, we had all our ammunition, see, where these other ships didn't. That's why we could fire more and all that.

DF: Okay. Well, let's get to that. You came back from the Philippines and you arrived approximately...?

ME: Four days before Pearl Harbor.

DF: Four days before Pearl Harbor. And aboard the ship, what was your job?

ME: Well, my job was everything. Seaman first class, you're everything, you know. Seaman second, you start as a mess cook, you know. And then seaman first class, you graduate, you have to holy stone the decks and all this here. They had their certain rules, seven strokes this way, seven this way here and all that. And you did all the jobs, what they—you know, working parties and so forth and all that. And my—I was a gun captain on a five-inch [*gun*] mount, Mount Two. First I started as a powder man, you know, shell man and powder man. Then...

DF: Where is Mount Two along the ship?

ME: Mount Two is on the port side, up forward, see. Mount Two and Four. Now the starboard is One and Three, the five-inch [*mounts*]. Then we had six-inch guns. You know, they were forward and aft, see.

DF: The weekend of sixth and seventh December, were you aboard the ship? Did you have duty or...?

ME: Yeah, I had the duty December 6 and 7, yeah.

DF: So it was a duty weekend for you?

ME: Duty weekend.

DF: What was the routine? What did you do that weekend?

ME: Well, that weekend we had to stand watches or stand forth and at that time, when, actually when we were called to general quarters, I was washing clothes.

DF: Sunday morning?

ME: Yes, Sunday morning. But you have to wash clothes whenever you get a chance, see, because a lot of times during the war even, we used to have rationing of water, you know. We used to have—they used to give you a bucket. You have to keep shining it and had to put it by your bunk, you know. You had a hook and all that and you had to keep it spit-polished. And when they rationed water, sometimes they rationed you a quarter of a bucket, half a bucket or something like that, see.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

(Conversation off-mike)

DF: Okay. Okay, so you were doing your laundry. Let me just ask you a quick question...

ME: Yeah.

DF: ...if you remember. What were you wearing? Were you in your dungarees or were you in skivvies or...?

ME: No, we were—we go by the uniform of the day and that day was shorts, white shorts, skivvy shirt, socks and shoes and the white hat, that's it.

DF: Okay. 'Cause you're in the tropics.

ME: Right.

DF: Right. Okay, so you're doing your laundry and a shipmate came down and...

ME: And he says, "Something don't look right."



So there's two of us. We went up with him and we're looking, we're looking.

DF: Where did you go aboard the ship?

ME: On the quarterdeck. See, because I was stationed on the port quarterdeck division, like Fourth Division. See, on the starboard side it's Third Division, see. And so we went on the quarterdeck there and we asked the officer of the deck what was wrong. He says, "Nothing's wrong."

DF: Let me stop you for a moment. Where was *St. Louis* berthed?

ME: We were alongside the [*USS*] *Honolulu*. *Honolulu* was by the dock [*pierside at berth B-21 Pearl Harbor Navy Yard*]. We were right here [*outboard*], next to her, tied up to her.

DF: Okay. And when you looked out across the harbor, what did you see? What was out there? I mean, what other ships or what—I'm trying to understand...

ME: Well, yeah. It was mostly all cruisers there where we were.

DF: Okay.

ME: See then the battleships were over there and we were over here. It was like us and the *Honolulu*, then there was the *San Francisco* and the heavy cruisers and all that like.

DF: So you were on the [navy] yard side of the harbor?

ME: Right.

DF: Okay, I understand.

ME: And then when general quarters sounded, we all went to our station. And that's when they said, "Well, Japanese are attacking."

They came from the sun. You couldn't see 'em. And you ever watch that sun in Hawaii over here when it's really bright? You can't see nothing. And they had three or four warnings. Army reported it, somebody else reported it, but they said, oh no, the B-17s were coming from the West Coast somewhere, you know.

And then there was two army privates. They had—I don't know what they had. They reported it and the duty officer said something that, just forget about it and...

DF: Well as you were there on the quarterdeck, looking across Pearl Harbor...

ME: Right.

DF: ...and looking towards the Battleship Row and looking towards Ford Island, what did you see?

ME: There was nothing. Everything was good. It was a nice Sunday morning. Then when they sounded general quarters, we were, I was right there, then you couldn't see nothing no more. I was inside of a five-inch [gun] mount. You know, it's all closed in.

DF: Okay. So you were in a five-inch [*gun*] mount...

ME: Right.

DF: ...when you reported to your battle station.

ME: And like I says, we were, I think, one of the only ships what had all their ammunition on there. But we had—see then the

*Honolulu* got hit with a 500-pound bomb by the dock and her. And it lifted our ship like almost out of the water like that too, you know.

DF: She was inboard of you?

ME: Yeah, she was inboard, by the dock. So that's when we chopped the lines off. We didn't even wait for the skipper or nothing like that. They chopped the lines down. And we had scaffolding all over. We didn't wait to do that. We were just get out. In fact, they had an admiral on the *Honolulu* and my skipper told him, "We're going out."

He says, "I wouldn't if I were you," he says.

But my skipper says, "Well, I'm going to go out. If I'm going to go down, I'm going to go down fighting."

We went out. We were strafed by planes and this bomb missing us. And we were right behind the *Nevada*. Now, if she didn't beach herself so we can get out of there, we would've never made it. And then when she beached—see, there was two planes, two waves. One plane, one wave had 178 planes, the other one had about 160-something. Then they had a third wave...

(Taping stops, then resumes)

DF: Now, did *St. Louis* already have steam up? I mean, you weren't on shore power?

ME: No. Well, it didn't take us long to get steam up, you know. But we had some trouble with our boilers for a while there. But then they got it working good. But see every ship was short of men because they were on liberty. And at that time, most of 'em got back but some didn't.

DF: Did your gun mount go into action there while you were still at...

ME: Yeah. We got right into action there. We got, we were in—in fact, we always claimed we shot down six planes. See, there was twenty-[*nine*] Japanese planes shot down. We always thought we got six, they credited us with three. And then like I told you, we were being strafed when we were going out. Bombs were dropping all the way around us. And then when the *Nevada* beached, we were going out. It was two torpedoes fired at us. And the captain, somebody reported it right away and he zigzagged so far and man, they both missed us and they hit the reef down there.

And we were supposed to have shot at that [*midget sub*] and we sunk it. Some say we did, some say we didn't, so I can't tell you that. You know, I was inside but everybody on the ship says we sunk it, so I don't know.

Then we got out of the channel and [*for*] four days we patrolled. We wanted to go out after the Jap fleet, 'cause we had—there was a couple of other cruisers come out and all that and got destroyers, but somebody told us not to. So we stayed around the area for four days. We never left our [*gun*] mount. They brought us food. They brought us everything, buckets. We had to go into the buckets and they dumped it all that. And then when we got in after four days, then...

DF: The captain then was—your captain happened to be aboard?

ME: Yeah, he was aboard.

DJ: He was aboard.

ME: And I always said they should have gave him a medal but they never did so....

DF: So the fact that you only had the half the crew or less, maybe...

ME: No, we had more than half of the crew. But they didn't let that many out. You know, maybe, you see, maybe one-third was off or, you know, one-quarter or something like that. But you don't just let half of the crew go, unless you're in the States or something like that.

DF: Well, when you went to general quarters, what were you thinking? What were you feeling? Were you excited or what was the feeling?

ME: To me, I thought it was a drill. Then somebody said, "It's the Japs!"

Well, then nobody, you didn't hear a sound from nobody. Everybody just clammed up.

DF: What was your job in the gun mount?

ME: Well, like I said, they were short a gun captain. I was a powder man and so I got the job as gun captain.

DF: And what were the gun captain's responsibilities? What did you have to do?

ME: Well, the gun captain would do, you know, they had a shell and a powder case and a shell case. When they were put in right, then they had somebody was wearing the phones to fire. You got the order to fire and then you had to ram it.

DF: How many people were in the mount with you?

ME: Well, there was a powder man, shell man, a gun captain, [*trainer etc*]. There was two guns, so it was the same way

on the other one. Then they had the person wearing the phones, getting all the orders. Then down below you had, where the shells come up through like, upwards and the powder room, the magazines and—so there was three on each gun. And there was one man wearing the phones where the orders came from, see, and one mount.

DF: Well, staying at general quarters for so long, I mean soon enough you had to have learned that it was the real deal.

ME: It was. And that was the worst I ever saw happened, sitting like that for four days, believe me.

DF: What was Pearl Harbor like when you returned?

ME: Well, when I returned, it looked, everything looked, you know, they were busy working on everything and all the water was still oily. And everybody was working on the ships, especially the battleships. And you see, as we were going out of the channel, I forgot to tell you. See, going out of the channel, you had to go only certain knots. See every knot is a mile and a tenth, like. And when we went out of there, twenty-six, twenty-three to twenty-six knots going out of that channel. And you know how many speeding tickets you would have got if you would do that now?

DF: Did you moor at the same place when you returned?

ME: No.

DF: No.

ME: We moored at somewhere else.

DF: If you can remember, try to describe what you saw there in the harbor when you came back.

ME: I saw everything. Everybody was working, working like a dickens. All the sunken ships they were trying to raise, which they raised every one except the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma*, because she turned right over. And because, you know, when we were going out of the channel, we had to go through the, you know, the Battleship Row. That's the only way to go out of the channel. And when we come back, oh, it was all a mess. But then they gave us liberty, you know, but like I said, you only gave you maybe one quarter at a time, because they don't want, they didn't know what the hell is going to happen.

My version, if they ever landed troops, the Japanese would have took that island. 'Cause there wasn't that much—all the planes, they were all bunched up. Hundred and sixty-eight planes that we lost all over there because of that. The ships were the same way. And I don't know if we ever learned our lesson because last five years when we come back, my grandson and me, we went in the navy yard, nobody asked us for a pass or nothing like that. We walked the whole navy yard.

DF: What could you—could you recall or any difference between how—let's talk about a liberty a little bit.

ME: Liberty.

DF: Was liberty different before the attack from after the attack?

ME: Yeah, very different.

DF: In what ways?

ME: Well, if you met a Japanese or somebody who looked like a Japanese, they would right away get scared and say, "Me American," you know, "me something," you know.

And you know especially if a sailor or a marine or a soldier got a few drinks and he thought he was a Jap, oh Christ, forget it, you know. They start trouble. So right away, the Jap or whoever looked like one would say, well, "Me American."

That's when they started to interrogate all the Japanese and they put 'em in, you know, their separate places like. But still, you know like today, Hawaii is owned by sixty percent of Japanese here.

DF: How long did *St. Louis* stay in Hawaiian waters after...

ME: (Coughs) Well, I don't think we stayed too long because then we made, we were transferring ships to the States and back, you know. And then we done that for a couple of weeks or months and then we went to the Kiska Islands. We bombarded Kiska and all them places down there. And the Bering Sea was so damn rough sometimes it took us a week or two weeks before we could get—that was one of the roughest seas out.

DF: You were up there in the Aleutians then during the Midway campaign?

ME: Right, Midway campaign, all that. *St. Louis* earned eleven battle stars.

DF: What were some of the actions that you remember?

ME: Well...

DF: Let me ask you this, you were on *St. Louis* until—for how long?

ME: Over five years.



DF: Until 1945. So the whole war you were on the *St. Louis*.

ME: Whole war.

DF: Midway was in May and June of '42.

ME: Forty-two.

DF: And what are some of the other things that you remember from the war?

ME: Well, we fought the longer sea battle and Kula Gulf.

DF: Where is Kula Gulf?

ME: That's somewhere in the Pacific. I'm [*sorry*]*—been so long and then...*

DF: It was the longest in time?

ME: In time, yeah, and that's when we lost the *Helena*, our sister ship, was the *Helena*. Light cruiser, CL-50. And we lost a British cruiser too then.

*[Note: The USS Helena was sunk on July 6, 1943 during the battle of Kula Gulf. No British ship was present or lost.]*

DF: Do you remember the month or year when that was?

ME: I would say roughly '43 or something like that. Then that's when we got our bow shot off, you know. Not completely, half of the bow come off, a torpedo hit it. We didn't lose no personnel, but then—and the only other time we got hit was in (coughs) when the suicide plane hit aft. We lost about forty men.

*[Note: USS St. Louis sustained a shell hit on the bow that caused twisting of the bow, but not it being severed off, during the Battle of Kula Gulf, July 6, 1943.]*

DF: During Okinawa now?

ME: Mm-hmm. That was another place we had so many kamikaze come at us, it was ridiculous. I mean every time we go to chow, we just sit down here and pour a cup of coffee, general quarters went.

DF: By the end of the war, what was your battle station job?

ME: (Coughs) Well...

(Conversation off-mike)

DF: Okay.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

DF: What sort of—how did your career, if you will, progress during the war? Did you stay in the [*Gun*] Mount Two [*as*] gun captain, or...

ME: No, no. Later on, I think it was 1944, there was a chief side cleaner he was boatswain's mate first class. He made chief there. And he was chief side cleaner, so I took the job and then I, they changed my—I had to go [*to R (Repair) Division*] down below. I wasn't no more in the mount, Gun Mount Two. I was like in the fighting fires or whatever it was I had to do down there. And they locked you in a compartment and safe. If you did get a torpedo hit, you have to see what you could do, shut off this compartment or that one, you know. And it was altogether different, see. But I was still closed in, you know, same way like the mount.

And then, like I told you, in 1945, they had a transfer for—see, I told you they wanted to give me chief then, because they told me to buy the uniform, but I didn't [*want to*]. So I took the transfer instead. Because I wasn't home for three years, or for almost four years, I figure, well—so I took the transfer.

And then this was in Okinawa, that's when they took Okinawa over and it was all mud. And the tents were mud, they had me sleep in the mud before they sent me into the States on one of these transports. And it was you sleep in a compartment, it had the bunks about eight-foot-eight, eight-tiered high. But to me, I didn't mind it. I mean it was this here but being that I was first class boatswain's mate, they, I had, I didn't have to line up for chow or nothing like that. They let me go ahead and all that so it was good.

Then when I got to the States, they gave me sixty-day leave for leave. And then I was assigned to Miami, Florida, shore patrol from Miami to Jacksonville, working with a detective. Then when the detective, he turned me in because he said I wasn't doing my job, which I was doing my job because—then they transferred me to substation in Key West. I said, "You did me a favor." I said, "I like it there at Key West."

DF: Going back to *St. Louis*, did you say that you changed? I mean were you a different person by the time you got to Okinawa, from how you were before Pearl Harbor?

ME: Yeah. I never talked, I would never talk about Pearl Harbor 'til forty years later almost. I never talked. You can ask my grandson. I never talked to my wife. I never talked nothing about Pearl Harbor. They would ask me anything, I said, "I don't know nothing."

DF: Why was that?

ME: To me, I thought it was all for nothing, myself. Should've never happened. We lost all them ships, all them planes. And it should've never, never, never happened. They had enough warnings. They could've sent planes up. Not one ship or nothing could've got hurt.

DF: Well, what about the experience of being on a combatant ship in eleven, with eleven battle stars, all that naval combat, how did that affect you? Or did it affect you?

ME: No, I don't know. It didn't affect me, I mean, as far as that. To me, it was a good experience. You learn something. But you didn't want to talk about it because it disturbed you and you didn't know how to go about it. You don't know how other people think about it if you told them. And every time I listen to, like with Pearl Harbor or something, it was always about battleships, never nothing about the tin cans or the cruisers. The fighting ships of the navy, battlewagons, they stayed fifteen, twenty miles, fired a shell. Cruisers, destroyers had to go in. We never got mentioned.

DF: How'd you feel about that?

ME: It, to me, it hurt me. I mean, you would too, you'd feel the same way. Do you know what it is to get out of Pearl Harbor on December 7 and they never mentioned it or nothing? They put it maybe in one little line on the back of the page. It isn't my fault because the battleship got—but you know give all the ships the credit what credit is due! I was on the fiftieth anniversary, I was on the fifty-five. All they talked about was the *Arizona*. They never mentioned these other battleships. Now they mention all the battleships. The *Oklahoma*, she was getting mad because she wasn't getting recognition. Don't forget, she lost 300, 400 men too. And you could hear them, the stories, how when the *Oklahoma* turned over and them men were banging over there, trying to let the people know that they were still alive for weeks!

DF: When did you first hear about that?

ME: Because I, when I got transferred off the *St. Louis*, there was other sailors from these ships. They were telling me about it. And you know how navy personnel, you get together. The officers are the same way. Chiefs are the same way. You have a cup of coffee and you B.S. and you...and that was it. But like I said, if credit is due, give it. No matter if you lost so many men or what. Just because you lost men don't favor that ship! Where credit is due, give it to 'em.

DF: Did you have close friends who were lost when you took the kamikaze hit?

ME: Yeah, we had—because I was transferred over there in the division there and over there with forty men. There was officers killed. There was—it was near the flight deck there. 'Cause we had a catapult, two catapults in the back. We had two seaplanes.

DF: Well, was this before you transferred or after you transferred?

ME: What's that, bomb hit?

DF: Yeah.

ME: Kamikaze?

DF: Kamikaze.

ME: No, that was before. I was on the ship. When I got off, nothing, they just went here or there, then they got decommissioned. That's when the Brazilian navy bought it the next year. And then the Brazilian navy kept it for about twenty years. In 1980, we tried to save the *St. Louis*, me

and the commander from New York. He just died about two months ago. I'm sorry to hear that, 'cause I just heard about it. And in fact, we were putting fifty dollars a month, each of us members of *St. Louis*, try to save the ship. And we had Congressmen, we had Senators, but we didn't have enough pull. So as they—this was in 1980—then as they were towing the *St. Louis*, they hit a storm and she sank. That's when he had our first reunion in Phoenix, Arizona.

DF: Did you go to that?

ME: Yes, sir. I went there—I go to a lot of 'em.

DF: So you still have friends who were shipmates?

ME: Right. In fact, I had a, I have a ship model, three-foot, of the *St. Louis*. Took a year to make. Cost me over \$3,000, ask my grandson. Sitting at our house.

DF: So you're very proud of the *St. Louis*.

ME: Hey, if you served almost over five and a half years, why, hey, you should be proud. Today, how many people served that long on one ship, chief?

?: (Inaudible)

ME: Two, three years maybe, right? I mean, like I was on that APA [*attack transport*] in Korea for two years. And when I was on that, it was night and day from being on a cruiser.

DF: Well, what did you like most about *St. Louis*? When you look back on those five years, five years plus that you were aboard her, before the war started, here at Pearl Harbor, all the action in the Pacific, when you think back on that, at that time, what do you remember most and what did you, what

meant the most to you? What comes to mind when you think about those times?

ME: Well, I liked it because we had a good crew. We had good officers and we had good men, you know. And we had—it depends a lot if you got good ports of liberty and so forth. And it depends a lot, you know. And especially if you're married, you can go get near your hometown, or something like that. It's good. There's a lot of things to think about and it's just that, not the ship alone, you know, it's what the ship does for you too.

DF: True. True.

ME: I mean, the ship's good to you, you'll be good to her, see. That's what we, we worked together, the ship and us. And we were known as the only ship who could never be sunk.

We used to get, when we fought the longer sea battle, we even got A's on every turret, every five-inch mount, every six-inch gun, everything we had. When we would fight these sea battles, we had more shells on the whole deck. You couldn't even walk.

DF: Was that a night action or a day...

ME: Night action. And I don't know, but my ship has sunk a lot of ships. I don't know, you know. I hear so many and this and that. But actually the story, I don't know whoever knows about it.

DF: Was there ever a time that you were afraid? That you were concerned, that you were worried about how things would turn out?

ME: Everybody's afraid. I'm not a hero. I don't think you guys were. I mean, but like I says, if you're on a good ship, be good to her and she'll be good to you. I always say that.

DF: Chief, did you have any other questions?

**David Jarvis (DJ):** I'm just interested, when you got under way, you were at battle stations...

ME: Yeah.

DJ: ...and you stayed offshore for about four days?

ME: Yeah.

DJ: Were you always at battle station during that period of time? Or did they allow you to go to your rack and sleep or did you sleep in the gun turrets?

ME: No, we had to stay the four days right at the gun turret.

DJ: Right.

ME: They gave us the buckets. We had to, you know, do doody and all that in there then they dumped it over the side, somebody was, and then they fed us over there and everything.

DJ: So everything would be, your whole voyage...

ME: No showers, no nothing. It's...

DJ: Now when you came back into port, were you at battle stations still?

ME: Well, we were like in, you see, they have a, you know, Condition Three, Condition Two...



DJ: Right, right.

ME: ...and...

DJ: I was referring to when you made re-entry into the channel, were you still at battle stations?

ME: Oh yeah, yeah. We didn't know what the hell happened, you know.

DJ: Okay, Oh, the last question I have is, when you got back to port, did you pick up sailors from other ships that weren't as fortunate as yours?

ME: Yeah, we picked up a lot of sailors from the *Nevada*.

DJ: Oh, okay.

ME: See, because we went from a peacetime crew to a wartime crew. See and the wartime crew, you know, you maybe you get 300, 400, up to 500 more men, see. Say you had a crew on the peacetime at 800, maybe. And then the wartime, you maybe get 1300, 1400, around there. We picked up a lot of men off the *Nevada*, I think, yeah.

DJ: Thank you. (Inaudible)

DF: Is there anything that you might want to talk about that we didn't ask, because we didn't know or didn't think of it?

ME: Well, the only thing I could tell you, like I told you, she was a good ship and like I always said, you get on a good ship, be good to her, she'll be good to you. You know, some guys, they get on a ship and they count the days and, "Oh, I want to get off this bucket of mud," or something like that, you know.

And to me, it's not fair. You, I went on the *St. Louis*. I [said], look, I gotta spend six years on her. If I have to do it, I'll do it. That's my home. I call her my home. And she was my home. And I was proud of her. And if I had to do it again, I'll do it.

DF: Well, on that note, I think we'll conclude the interview. It was a real pleasure.

(Taping stops then resumes)

ME: [*My great-grandson he told his teacher about how the St. Louis was only major ship to get out of Pearl Harbor, the teacher told him no ship got out*]... he comes by me he says, "Grandpa, you told me a lie."

I says, "Your grandpa don't lie." So I said, "You go back to school he'll apologize to you."

Sure enough. Next day, he apologized to him. And he called me up, he was all smiles. I said, "Are you all right?"

See, they never say nothing. Nobody knows it.

DF: That's right. That's right.

ME: A lot of people don't even know that today!

DF: That's right. That's right.

DJ: Yeah, all the know is the *Nevada* didn't make it.

ME: No! And we were right behind her and we were doing twenty-six knots. My friend, I have a friend, like I told you, he was on the *Oglala*. His ship was sunk and in fact he was the president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors for two years.

He was vice president \_\_\_\_\_. And he says after his ship got sunk, he went on the dock and he says, "Goddamn, look at Mike's ship go out there! He could break every goddamn speeding record out. He would get about twenty tickets!"

DJ: Did they light up all the boilers that morning?

ME: Yeah.

DJ: So it was all from a cold start.

ME: Well, for a while they wouldn't start and they got 'em all going there. Boy, but we went out like going out of hell.

DF: Yah.

ME: So it took me maybe forty years to talk about it, or maybe a little more, but I talk, you know, now because we went to, with the Pearl Harbor Survivors, took them a long time before they went into (inaudible). And anybody in the Pearl Harbor Survivors, wherever I live, they want me to help 'em, I help 'em. Like I showed you the letter.

DF: Right.

ME: I just moved to Iowa. Somebody asked me for help, I help 'em.

DF: Sure.

ME: I know if I want help, I would want somebody to help me. But some people won't do that.

DF: Well, I wish we'd been shipmates.

ME: Well, hey, I have a commander. Him and I was first class on the ship, right, and he made commander. He says, "You know, you could've been captain?"

I says, "I don't want it. I don't want nothing." I says, "I got the experience. I got the knowhow. I know how to get along by myself. I was taught the good hard way," and I said, "nobody can take that away from me."

DF: No. No.

ME: I says, "I will help people. If anybody wants help, they want it, I'll help 'em."

But I says—then that's the way to be. But some people won't help you at all! If you need help, you know. It's just like the other day, last night. We went over there, you know, \_\_\_\_\_?

DF: Yes.

ME: So some Pearl Harbor survivor told me to go see that guy, that he works for the VA [*Veterans Administration*], doesn't he, in Maryland or where was that? So I asked them, you know, I showed him the letter, and he's telling me whether I gotta go to the cemetery, that the guy is—what'd he say or something?

DJ: Discharge

DF: The discharge papers.

ME: I said, "How am I going to do that?" I says, "I went to that cemetery a couple of times, I don't see nobody there!"

DF: Yeah.

ME: And I says—so then he's telling me to go see so-and-so, so-and-so. So I showed it to the captain, you know, and I showed them the letter. And he says he would try to help

me out (intelligible). I said, "Good," I said, "because I hate to go home and see the grave unmarked."

DF: Sure.

ME: The man is a hero.

DF: Right.

ME: I mean maybe he's not a hero, but he tried to fight—and for them to make a hospital on his name, to me, I think it's, he deserves something!

DF: You're absolutely right. Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW